



Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)  
VA MIDWEST HEALTH CARE NETWORK  
Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN) 23  
Network Update  
December 2012  
[www.visn23.va.gov](http://www.visn23.va.gov)



*Whatever your tradition, however you choose to celebrate, we extend warm greetings for the holidays and best wishes for a healthy and prosperous New Year.*



Don't be sick this holiday season or as you start your New Year.

Be ready for the flu season by getting your flu shot.

### Step Up to Prevent Flu

Flu season is upon us. Influenza (flu) presents health challenges not only to us as individuals, but to our families and our VA and neighborhood communities. Flu is a respiratory illness that spreads easily. It is caused by viruses that can change from year to year.

Each year in the U.S., flu causes more than 226,000 hospitalizations and about 36,000 deaths. Even though most of these cases are among people age 65 and older, anyone can get the flu. This is why it is important for all of us to “step up” and help stop the spread of flu! The best way to stop the flu is by getting vaccinated.

**Flu shots are available** for Veterans enrolled in VA health care and VA staff. Check with your [nearest VA health care facility](#). The flu shot is recommended for people 6 months of age and older.

**Flu** – short for influenza – is a respiratory illness that spreads easily from person to person.

**Flu vaccination** is your best protection against the flu, which usually begins in the fall and can continue through late spring. Protection can take up to 2 weeks to develop after vaccination and it lasts about a year.



**IT'S YOUR CALL**

Confidential help for  
Veterans and their families

• • • • Confidential chat at [VeteransCrisisLine.net](http://VeteransCrisisLine.net) or text to 838255 • • • •

The Veterans Crisis Line connects Veterans in crisis and their families and friends with qualified, caring Department of Veterans Affairs responders through a confidential toll-free hotline, online chat, or text. Veterans and their loved ones can call **1-800-273-8255** and **Press 1**, [chat online](#), or send a text message to **838255** to receive confidential support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. To learn more go to <http://veteranscrisisline.net>

## VETERANS GET JOB OPPORTUNITY



Six Veterans in the VA Black Hills Health Care System (BHHCS) got a new lease on life last month when they entered into the Homeless Veterans Apprenticeship Program and became the newest full-time employees at Black Hills National Cemetery near Sturgis, SD.

Apprentices were referred from VA BHHCS's Homeless Veteran Supported Employment Program (HVSEP). HVSEP provides vocational assistance, job development and placement, and ongoing employment support to Veterans who are homeless, formerly homeless, or at-risk of homelessness and enrolled in a VA BHHCS Homeless Program.

## American Legion Auxiliary – Bring Holiday Cheer and Gifts

Inpatients around our Network don't need to worry about having time to buy a holiday gift for a family member, thanks to the hundreds of Volunteers who support the American Legion Auxiliary Gift Shops. Veterans who are inpatients or undergoing long-term treatment are able to select a free gift from items auxiliary members purchase throughout the year. ALA volunteers wrap and ship gifts as needed. For more information about the program or to see how you can assist, contact your local American Legion Auxiliary or VA Voluntary Service at your nearest VA medical center.

## Veterans Health Benefits Guide



VA has developed a [Veterans Health Benefits Guide](#) to provide Veterans general information about the VA Medical Benefits Package. The information in this Veterans Health Benefits Guide reflects the benefits and services available to enrolled Veterans at the time it was published. Since VA policies are governed by law, changes to programs or eligibility may occur. If you have questions, contact the Enrollment Coordinator at your local VA health care facility or call us at 1-877-222- VETS (8387).

To learn more go to

[http://www.va.gov/healthbenefits/access/medical\\_benefits\\_package.asp](http://www.va.gov/healthbenefits/access/medical_benefits_package.asp).

## VA Health Benefits - VA Emergency Care

A medical emergency is generally defined as a condition of such a nature that a prudent layperson would reasonably expect that delay in seeking immediate medical attention would be hazardous to life or health. You may receive emergency care at a non-VA health care facility at VA expense when a VA facility (or other Federal health care facility with which VA has an agreement): Cannot furnish economical care due to your distance from the facility; or when VA is unable to furnish the needed emergency services. To learn more log on at [http://www.va.gov/healthbenefits/access/emergency\\_care.asp](http://www.va.gov/healthbenefits/access/emergency_care.asp).



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## Announcements and Calendar of Events for December 2012

**December 4:** [VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System](#) - Quilts of Valor from 5:30-6:30pm. More than 30 Veterans will be presented personalized, handmade quilts by the Omaha Quilters Guild to recognize their service. The presentation is being held in collaboration with the VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System returning Veterans program and the Office of Public Affairs. All are welcome to attend and help honor our Veterans.

**December 18:** [St. Cloud VA Health Care System](#) - **Veterans' Law Clinic** from Noon-2 p.m.(CST) in Building T-100 at St. Cloud VA Medical Center, 4801 Veterans Dr., St. Cloud, Minn. Free legal consultation for Veterans for: Social Security Law, Housing, Consumer, Child Support, Family Law, and Employment. No criminal law issues will be discussed. Please call 320.253.0138 or 1.800.622.7773 to schedule an appointment.

**December 21:** [St. Cloud VA Health Care System](#) - **Southwestern Minnesota Veterans' Law Clinic** from Noon-2 p.m. (CST) at the Montevideo VA Clinic, 1025 North 13th St., Montevideo, Minn. Free legal consultation for Veterans for: Social Security Law, Housing, Consumer, Child Support, Family Law, and Employment. No criminal law issues will be discussed. Please call 320.430.1051 to schedule an appointment.

VA Black Hills HCS - [www.blackhills.va.gov](http://www.blackhills.va.gov)  
VA Central Iowa HCS - [www.centraliowa.va.gov](http://www.centraliowa.va.gov)  
Fargo VA HCS - [www.fargo.va.gov](http://www.fargo.va.gov)  
Iowa City VA HCS - [www.iowacity.va.gov](http://www.iowacity.va.gov)  
Minneapolis VA HCS - [www.minneapolis.va.gov](http://www.minneapolis.va.gov)

VA Nebraska W. Iowa HCS - [www.nebraska.va.gov](http://www.nebraska.va.gov)  
Sioux Falls VA HCS - [www.siouxfalls.va.gov](http://www.siouxfalls.va.gov)  
St. Cloud VA HCS - [www.stcloud.va.gov](http://www.stcloud.va.gov)  
VISN 23 - [www.visn23.va.gov](http://www.visn23.va.gov)

HCS – Health Care System VA – Department of Veterans Affairs

For More information, call the Network Office at 651-405-5600 or  
Log on at [www.visn23.va.gov](http://www.visn23.va.gov) or email [sharyl.schaepe@va.gov](mailto:sharyl.schaepe@va.gov)